

USGS Education / Business Partner Event Report

National Association of Interpreters (NAI) Workshop (2005 Annual Conference).

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Event Dates: 8-12 November 2005

Location: Mobile, Alabama



Mobile's waterfront. The NAI conference rotates between different regions of the NAI each year. The region also provided field trip opportunities for the attendees—to coastal terrain, local wetlands, local African American and other historical sites, and other places where attendees could learn more about cultural and environmental interpretation.



Description of Event

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, to *interpret* means to explain or tell the meaning of, or present in understandable terms. It also means to represent by means of art, or bring to realization by performance. To impart understanding of natural and cultural resources by means of art, music, explanation, drama, graphics, and other means is exactly what the 4,500 members of the National Association of Interpreters (NAI) do. The organization's web address is <http://www.interpnet.com>.

Interpretive work includes sciences such as environmental studies, geology, climatology, geography, and hydrology, but also includes performing arts, visual arts, graphic arts, and the means to communicate to a wide variety of audiences. The USGS mission has similarities to that of the NAI: We conduct scientific research, but we also must continually think about how to impart our mission, data, and science results to a wide variety of users. In addition, our organization came from a heritage of interpreting and understanding of the Earth beginning in the early 1800s with Lewis and Clark.



The NAI has grown from 2,200 members in 1990 to over 4,500 today, representing all USA states and 30 countries.



We were privileged to receive a visit at our USGS exhibit from Evelyn Kirkwood, President of NAI.

USGS Activities at NAI Conference

- (1) Conduct in-conference workshop on interpreting the landscape using USGS resources, and using GIS, GPS, and topographic maps in interpretive work.
- (2) Attend Federal Interagency Committee meeting.
- (3) Operate USGS information exhibit.
- (4) For the 3rd year in a row, we wrote a paper entitled *Interpreting the Landscape with USGS Spatial Data* to accompany the workshop, which was published in the 2005 *Interpretive Sourcebook*.



We have the opportunity with the NAI to work with some of the most creative people, people who are skilled at what they do and are passionate about doing it. Above, a self-described “rent-a-naturalist” who is about to embark on the 1,000-mile walk taken by John Muir a century ago.

The NAI conference is structured as follows: Day 1--Tuesday: Setup, preconference workshops, exhibit opening. Day 2—Wednesday: Keynote, exhibit, workshops, and exhibits. Day 3: Thursday--Keynote, workshops and exhibits. Day 4: Friday--Field Trips. Day 5: Saturday--Workshops.



Attendance at this year's conference numbered around 650, including interpretive guides, rangers, museum curators, nature center managers, students of environmental and social sciences, tourism professionals, display and signage professionals, educators,

and federal, county, and state employees of land-based agencies.

The next NAI conference will be held in November 2006 in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Federal Interagency Council on Interpretation Meeting



We attended the Federal Interagency Council on Interpretation meeting during the conference, and discussed the awards process and the upcoming Definitions Project.

In-Conference Workshop

For the 4th year in a row, we conducted an in-conference workshop on mapping, GPS, GIS, coordinates, USGS resources for interpretive work (images, books, maps, real time data, and so on) at the NAI conference.



Steve Reiter with the participants in our in-conference workshop. We were pleased at the high attendance for the workshop (25). It was a pleasure to work with the attendees, who hailed from other federal agencies (National Park Service and the US Forest Service, for example), state and local government, private industry, universities, and nonprofit organizations.



The workshop included hands-on and discussion about how to use Landsat imagery, GPS, topographic maps, aerial photographs, historical maps and imagery, real-time spatial web sites, and other geographic data and tools in interpretive work.



The demonstration portion of the workshops included a focus on USGS books, maps, and digital spatial data.

Our goal was to illustrate to the attendees that for any region, there is a wealth of USGS resources to aid in interpretive work.



We discussed ways to access USGS information, such as the USGS product warehouse, the USGS Map Store, the USGS Education Map Catalog, The National Map, the real-time water information, Terraserver, real-time stream flow information, and more. We shipped and gave away lessons and guidelines. We have also posted this information to the outreach website.

Attendees, shown here collecting coordinates with the GPS units, were very enthusiastic about the workshop, rating it in a positive manner on the evaluation forms.



During the field work component, we explained and practiced datum, tracks, routes, waypoints, satellite reception, and other functions with the attendees.

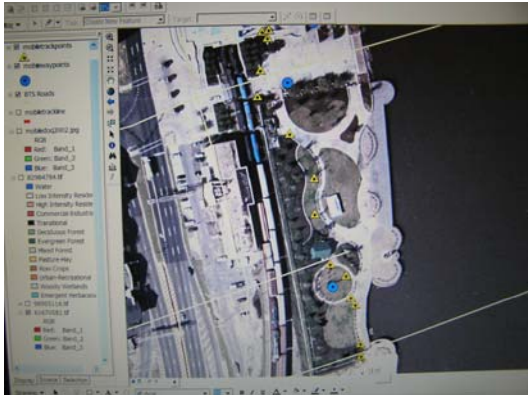


We were privileged to have several interpreters from Puerto Rico at our workshop.



We noticed some hurricane damage along the waterfront; the locals told us it was because of the storm surge; in other words, water, not wind.





Results of the GPS track that the attendees collected, plotted with ArcGIS on a USGS DOQ, and hyperlinked to photographs we had taken en route. GPS coordinates displayed atop a DOQ in ArcGIS, illustrating the nearness of the points to their actual locations. We also used the GIS demonstration to illustrate the USGS digital data sets that are available. All of this GIS preparation work required several weeks to prepare, but it was worth the effort.

USGS Information Exhibit

Our exhibit was quite popular with the conference attendees. We distributed posters, information sheets, maps, educational packets, product overviews, and guidelines on how to use USGS data, services, and products. We showed USGS resources on the Internet and USGS base data in a GIS.



Steve Reiter (L) and Joseph Kerski at our USGS information exhibit.



We displayed this new map from John Kosovich showing potential storm surge in Florida.



We displayed this new LIDAR and flood map of New Orleans, which also attracted much attention.

Our exhibit included a computer with an Internet connection, which came in quite handy when we were demonstrating resources to attendees, and answering their questions. We demonstrated sites such as the USGS Map Store, the Publications Warehouse, Landsat imagery, DOQs and DRGs on Terraserver, wildfire mapping, real-time stream flow, and more.

During workshops, exhibit traffic was lighter, but we found that people often would stay at the exhibit for 20 or even 30 minutes or more with specific questions.

We arranged the exhibit space to encourage the attendees to spend time

inside it by not blocking off the space with tables. We used one curved popup backdrop, featuring the 1849 map of the USA, 1940 and 1982 maps of Mobile, and the maps referred to above.

USGS personnel necessary to work this conference are those with experience with the public, with USGS products and services, with potential business partners, and with interpreters—their needs, their programs, and their background.

Acknowledgements

A successful presence at the NAI conference would not have been possible without the support of Gene Jackson, Sherry Jackson, and others who were involved in the months of planning that led up to the event. We thank Steve Vandas and Gene Jackson for emergency on-site rescue operations!

Recommendations

(1) This was the 5th year in a row that the USGS has participated in the NAI conference and the 4th year in which Steve and Joseph have participated. Previous year conference reports are available on:

<http://rockyweb.cr.usgs.gov/public/outreach/reports/nai03t.pdf>

and

<http://rockyweb.cr.usgs.gov/public/outreach/reports/nai04t.pdf>

We commend our USGS colleague Gene Jackson for his role in initiating USGS work with the NAI. We believe that this group of people is an excellent one to work with because their work is interpreting the land and its people—their environment, culture, history, flora, and fauna. It would be difficult to find a

more suitable organization for these professionals to be in touch with than one whose mission has always been to study the Earth—the USGS.

The NAI conference is an opportunity to network with some of the country's most creative people. This isn't just the most creative *interpretive* people, but the most creative people in *any* profession. Where else can one learn about bones, microscopes, landscape architecture, owl pellets, literature, and satellite images in one place? Interpretive work seems to draw people with a gift for storytelling, graphic arts, visual arts, history, geology, geography, environmental education, and many more fields. For example, we talked again with Budd Wentz who designed and built his own large format (with no squinting!) microscope and many more. It is refreshing to realize that one can get a great field-based job with a history or environmental studies degree, as evidenced by the attendees.

(2) Our exhibit provided an excellent venue to network with attendees and other exhibitors, many of whom we already work with (USFS, NPS, BLM, NASA, etc.).

(3) We still need to work on a bureau-wide effort to more fully integrate biology resources into USGS workshops and exhibits. For the NAI, the most appropriate biology related resources are those dealing with invasive species and with biodiversity. This needs to be resolved before we'll ever truly be a seamless organization in terms of our communicating to the public at conferences.

(4) As in other conferences that we participate in, the combination of exhibit and workshop is an excellent one. From the exhibit, we routed people to our workshop.

(5) We should write an article for the NAI journal *Legacy*. We should also submit several tips for the *Interpretive Tips and Techniques* book, such as one that highlights GOS2, Terraserver, and USGS imagery.

(6) We might want to pursue work with several of the chapters of the NAI, particularly with the one that focuses on Native Americans.

Conference Exposition



Exhibitors at the NAI conference are quite creative with their displays and what they offer interpreters.



Because the NAI includes some of the most creative people, speaking with the other exhibitors not only helps us understand the content of interpretative work, but it provides excellent examples of how information can be displayed.

The approximately 40 exhibitors may be categorized as:

1) Government agencies with a lands emphasis, including USGS, FWS, NPS, USFS, NASA, and BLM.

2) Nonprofit organizations, such as the North American Association for Environmental Education.

3) Companies that manufacture display items (displays, signs, etc) for interpretive centers and museums.

4) Companies that produce and/or distribute items for interpreters, such as CDs, posters, activities, and much more.

5) Book publishers and distributors.

6) Chapters of the NAI, including regional sections, African Americans, Native Americans, Environmental Education, and Cultural Interpretation.

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